

Gatherings from Life and Time

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GATHERINGS
FROM LIFE AND TIME



GATHERINGS

FROM LIFE AND TIME

BY
EDA MACLEAN

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
DEDICATED TO J. T. M.	7
TO A SHEET OF PAPER	9
RICHES	11
MY PRAYER	12
'TO THE EDGE OF THE FOREST A WELL-KEPT GARDEN GREW'	13
'IT IS SO SAD TO OUTLIVE WHAT WE LOVE' . . .	15
'THE HUSH IN NATURE THAT PRECEDES THE STORM'	16
AUGUST 19TH, 1919	17
'WHY TRY TO BE WHAT YOU ARE NOT' . . .	18
'O YOU UNSEEN POWERS SUPPLY MY LACK' . .	18
'ARROWS OF LIGHT SHOT ACROSS THE SKY' . .	19
'NATURE HAD BEEN TOO KIND'	20
'THE GLOW OF THE SUN HAS JUST DIED OUT OF THE WESTERN SKY'	24
'LET ME BE THE INSTRUMENT'	25
'I WAIT, AND WAIT, BY THE OPEN DOOR' . . .	26
LONELINESS	28
WELTSCHMERZ	29

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
'MY HEART'S WILD YEARNING'	30
'TWIXT NIGHT AND DAWN'	31
ENVY	32
HOPE	33
GOOD-BYE	34
'DEAR GOD! UPON YOUR FOOTSTOOL I STOOD' . .	36
'SHE WALKED INTO LIFE'S MARKET-PLACE' . .	38
'A FOUNTAIN WITH BOWL WIDE-LIPPED'	40
MEANINGS	41
WHAT WAS SAID	42
WHAT DO I KNOW?	43
PEACE	44

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Dedicated to J.T.M.

SO long ago, we began our voyage
On life's uncharted sea.
My youth was yours, and yours was mine,
Our port we knew not,
Only a trackless immensity confronted
You and me.

Ah yes, long ago is that day in May
When we began our life together.
Hand in hand we met the storms and calms,
The hurricanes—oh, how many we have weathered.
And the cyclone that swept our ship
Across the muddy seas
And rattled her sturdy timbers,
Until they shook like dead branches
On old trees.
And when the sun shone upon the rippling waters,
Side by side we laughed, and loved the change
That gave us rest from conflict.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

And you grew into a stalwart manhood,
And tamed my flaming moods
More suited to the day.
You tempered the winds of adversity for me,
Your back braced against the world's cold spray,
And so I grew into my womanhood.
Your tireless hand upon the helm that steered our
course,
My eyes fixed upon the star that dared not be lost.

And now the years confront us
When one must sail alone
Into another port, across trackless space and light,
Into new worlds, uncharted as the sea of life.
One of us must go, and one must stay,
Which one goes, who can say?
But ere we part, with joy I give
To you these pages that come so late.
They sing of life and time,
They are the seaside gatherings
From our wandered years,
And to you my helpmate,
All I am I dedicate.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

To a Sheet of Paper.

BLANK and empty,
 You
Lie before me.
I approach your clean white surface
With awe.
What am I,
That my touch should defile
The purpose of your perfection?
Yet,
Is your purpose fulfilled,
When you lie there so clean,
So beautiful, so empty?
A good script,
With ripened meaning,
But completes
Your existence.
The great question now is,
My script, my meaning?

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Am I worthy?
Or am I but a usurper,
Taking from some one else
Who should come to you,
The rights and privileges
Of your purpose?
You lie before me,
The helpless victim.
My impotence is forced upon you,
But if God wills it,
The mystic Force
Of perfect union may come to pass.
Your clean, chaste purity
Gives me the passionate
Joy
Of a creator.
O God, give me potency,
Give me vigour,
Let me fertilise this virgin page.
And may the pregnancy of this book
Bring forth a fine flutter
Of many pages,
This is my prayer.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Riches.

IT does not reach into the depths
And appease me,
All this that round me lies.
Others count my riches
In awe, without disguise,
But I, poor pauper, cry :
Fill my empty heart before I die.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

My Prayer.

TRUE let me be
To my soul's law,
Steadfast to that
Which is my need:
To my heart's truth
Let me be true,
And humbly sing
My song, and do
Each day my deed.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

TO the edge of the forest a well-kept garden grew,
'Twas a garden rare with flowers of every hue;
Through the spring, through the summer, she wandered there,
For a woman gave it her tenderest care.

She was always alone, yet full of cheer,
For hers was the seeing eye and the list'ning ear;
She watched the changeling bud to fulfilled dreams
of beauty,
Whose balsam laved her ardour, and her loving duty
Crept into the earth's untempered joy of stolen booty.

And when the seasons leaped one into the other,
At each she stemmed the breach.
O woman, eternal watching, waiting mother,
Between conscious charms and unknown paths your
reach
But storms the parapet that divides to know, from
not to know.

Yet 'twas to the untamed forest she turned and
listened,

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

For its insistent whisperings ever louder grew,
While her eyes followed the cawing rook that flew
Into the wood's mystic depths, where the rilling brook
Formed a stagnant pool, and gave drink to the owl
 with sinister look
That chose the night to see, and never forsook
The dark for gentle changelings of brilliant hue.

The graceless chance of the passing years followed fast,
Age crept apace and ruthless its shadowed loneliness
 cast
Into her heart its mate, that sought the darkness in
 the wood
And lured with sinister force each latent mood.
One moonlight night while her flowers slept,
Her halting feet along the perilous pathway crept
That led like a silver thread to the wayward brook
And hid its stagnant pool so deep in the forest's
 most sacred nook ;
Here, in its dark unmirrored shrine, she laid down her
 weary head,
No longer alone : for the brook laved and cozened
 her dead.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

IT is so sad to outlive what we love,
And now as I listen to the wail
Of the winter wind, methinks
'Tis but a cry for the summer's dead,
For what has been and now is not.

The morning shadows on the far-off hills
Bring longings that make me feel afraid.
I so long to be free that a torrent rushes
Through my soul and escapes in wild
Strange wishes. By-and-by it dwindles
And becomes a little babbling rill,
I play again among the pebbles and the flowers;
Again like an ocean fear surrounds me,
My love is strong and passionate,
But fierce as it is it holds a throb of fear
Lest I suffer the loss supreme
Of its own perfection.
My prisoned soul throbs
Like the glow in the heart of a ruby.
O, keep me safe from the eyes that hurt.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

THE hush in nature that precedes the storm,
The calm that fortifies the fighter,
Heaven-given mysteries, you tell not your secret.
Fragments hurl themselves,
Like sunbeams mad with wasted colour,
Forth from the cannon's open jaws.
Lord, what a lust is battle,
When demons shout and roll
Upon each other, fiery-eyed,
Nor stop to get the truth
Of Nature's fortitude, toward the suffering
Of the people on her bosom.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

August 19th, 1919.

ETERNITY looms ahead,
Maturity lies far behind.
Life greets life,
Fear leaps in bounds
And ties the strands of the dead.
Tear them, break them,
Do not let them bind,
The way is near for you to find,
And on its pathway you will meet
Him, and He will guide your halting feet.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

WHY try to be what you are not,
Why seek another's crown of fame ?
Make your difference rise supreme :
A tranquil soul will always reign.

O YOU unseen powers supply my lack,
Complete me.
Breathe your wisdom upon me, O wise one,
Flow through me, celestial essence,
Blow wide your omnipotence,
And take me within the circle of those who receive
Your bounty.
Heal me where I am wounded,
Help my need,
For it is of the spirit and not of the flesh,
O wise one, you know, for yours is the knowledge
Of all things.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

ARROWS of light shot across the sky,
Hurrying the clouds on their way.
A child crept under the garden flox,
And the barnyard fowls signalled fear.
Great wails arose from the people
As the black mass came hurrying on.
The throb of moving steel was deaf'ningly
Near, and nearer it came.
A face limned out in the light,
Blanched, stern, but unafraid.
Down came the great winged beetle:
Upon the earth it glided and stepped
Daintily as a bird alights from a long flight,
And a roar came from the throats of the people
In the big city that warmed the frozen blood
Of the airman who came first, the hero
Who won the great race across the endless ocean.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

NATURE had been too kind, his charm set him
 apart
For wayward women and pretty girls to hang upon
 his word
As bees beset a honeyed blossom.
Life was full for him, the years flew past uncounted
But for the hour or the day that held an added zest
To senses that knew no surfeit.

Year after year he played the game—he wooed, won ;
A loss or two was but the added fillip to the quest.
Then she came set apart from all the others
For reasons near the same that singled him,
Yet with this difference: she was condemned to petty
 joys,
Hers was a nature gasping for air from the shallows.

Like a tornado passion swept across
And sent him way beyond his will. But he was so
 framed
He could rise to noblest things,

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

When the mad passion-rent pulses had ebbed to
calmer mood

And high with pride he would ride the hours.

Such poor doubleness she was saved ;
Faithfulness was not her creed : hers was to rend
The sacred ties that bind in high fellowship ;
To change and wear new-fashioned gear and smile
Upon the one who caressed and lavished greatest gold.

Two forces fashioned to oppose, not to fuse and melt
into one,

Were they ; but this neither knew, though both were
wise

In ethics of the game they had squandered years to
play.

Like children wearied by their play they married :
He with serious mien, she with thoughts no deeper
than a shallow stream.

Ah me ! the unrest and the error that came to pass.
She was but the harlot in a rookery, while he quaffed
The dregs of the quassia cup again and yet again.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

But back within his better self lay hero stuff,
And upon these strings fate laid his bow and began
to play.

Some deep energy compelled him to satisfy
An unknown need that stirred to life within his soul.
His will was prisoner to the double grasp of misery
and hope.

We may not make this world a paradise, the faltering
strings
Acclaimed, but love still lives they sang.

She, heard only the frogs singing by her shallow pool,
Her ears had never opened to the higher tones that
round her rang ;

She fought the oppressing years with dyes and paints
and sham,

Shed tears, felt terrors in their resistless sweep,
While he looked on and made his creed to suit her
mood.

So, like a child playing on a barren hill,
Feigning a thing to strive for or avoid, he grew a soul

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

That fenced with the beating winds of truth
And denied the obvious to make-believe the real.
Fate had made him heir to the woe of stifling truth.

The past will never change ; the future, thought stops
there,
And fate had made him heir to the woe of stifling
truth.

Then came one, a creature of flame, spirit, and fire,
Dauntless in her noblest hopes and virile youth and
beauty—
’Twas then he knew that love still lives.

Would the hero stuff stand the strain prolonged by
fate?
He played on, halted once or twice tempted by the
rising flood
Of love close pressed by the anguish of denial,
Yet he won, for out of anguish rose pity, and out of
denial
Strength, and to the weak one by his side he clung.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

THE glow of the sun has just died out of the
western sky,
The autumn moon is coming up over the wooded hill,
The insects chirp all about me with infinite skill
Their tuneful welcome to the coming night.
The peace, oh, the peace that is all about me,
And no one to hear it, no one but I,
That mystic strain that rises 'twixt earth and sky.
Yes, HE who repeats it so softly, He hears it,
While I gasp, and tremble, and wonder the eternal
WHY?

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

LET me be the instrument,
Oh, play upon me ;
Let me feel that I have many tones
Of subtle meanings for your use,
Use them all, oh, use me,
Unify and harmonize me into yourself.
O great omnipotent being,
Let me rise to you,
And your meaning.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

I WAIT, and wait, by the open door
For your coming, O lover of my soul.
I saw the ash-tree buds
Unfold their wine-red swaddling clothes,
To greet the early spring;
And all the summer long,
Their growing, changing leaves
Companioned me.

Then they began to fall,
And I watched them
Driven by the autumn winds,
But you have not come,
O lover of my soul,
You have not come.

And now the days are over-long,
And I am weary, oh, so weary,
Waiting for you by the open door.
The winter wind wails
Through the leafless trees,

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

O lover of my soul,
I join its wailing cry ;
My yearning grief greets every cheer,
So bleak, so barren, and so bare
Am I without you, dear.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Loneliness.

I AM sitting alone
Before the dying fire,
Alone, without hope, without desire.

The sun, it will not shine,
The wind will sigh and shriek ;
Why echo through my heart, so bleak,
Why so bleak ?

Oh, fire burn, oh, sun shine,
Nature be kind to me, alone
Before the dying fire,
Alone, without hope, without desire.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Weltschmerz.

WHERE God is greatest, where profoundest
silence dwells,
And where eternities in unknown æons roll,
'There lies the tear that never to the surface wells,
Life's pledge wrung from the soul.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

MY heart's wild yearning
Calls into limitless space,
And sounds down the unfathomable
Immensity of measureless waste.
Evasive, as an echo dies,
Yet marvellously clear,
Hear, oh hear my yearning cry
For unhorizoned skies,
Or satisfy me here.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

'T'WIXT night and dawn, to you I blindly flew.
Young were my wings, untried the strength
they lent.

I strove with might against the force that drew,
I strove with force against the might that sent.

I struggled long with error, long with right,
Until my strength had ebb'd and sleep o'ercame.
I was a spirit born 'twixt morn and night,
Conceived in strife that had no hope, no name.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Envy.

BY the garden hedges low,
Stately Phillis wanders slow,
In her hand she holds a rose,
On her cheek the soft wind blows,
I with faltering footsteps go
To the garden hedges low.

Jealous am I, sweetest rose,
Of the softest wind that blows,
Stately Phillis' cheek you own,
While I without the hedges roam.

O beware, fairest rose,
Softest wind that blows,
Touch my Phillis' cheek no more
Else I pluck you where you grow,
And become your deadliest foe.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Hope.

O BIRDLING with the diamond in thy beak,
Thy dainty widespread wings of pearl,
Thy oblong body and thy tail of gold,
Seek in that realm beyond our ken,
For me, the rarest thing, the gem
That never comes to stay with men.

'Twould be unwise to give it name,
Else ev'ry bird whate'er its breed,
Had it but tail of gold and wings of pearl,
Through that vast unknown would try to fly.
Away the bird flew toward the sky,
But back it came with fright to cry.

Heed you what Omar said :
'Thou thyself art Heaven and Hell, Heaven
But a dream of fulfilled desire,
And Hell but the image of a soul on fire,'—
But I, the rarest bird that flies
Bring Hope the diamond from the skies,
And give it thee to still thy sighs.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Good-bye.

BLOW, blow, ye winds so pure, roll thunders, roll,
Echo back the pleasure of a happy dream.
Joy borne of joy, at thy oncoming, my frozen soul
Did melt and sing to thee, to thee, supreme.

So fugitive, so sweet, heart-breaker thou!
And yet not thee, my hapless fate I chide;
Like moonbeams in the pool it haunts, I trow,
Thy joybeams thou hast scattered far and wide.

A music sweeter than Love's long regret
Cadenced thy passing! And I woke to hear
A chord, thawed from the icy fret,
It sang, 'I've dreamed of thee, of thee, dear.'

Dreamed of thee, fearless, tender, so true,
Waked but to say Good-bye, and find thee gone,
Leaving a tearful splendour, 'mid the rue
And sighing waters, the drear and empty dawn.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Blow, blow, ye winds so pure, roll thunders, roll,
Echo back the pleasure of a happy dream.
Joy borne of joy, at thy oncoming, my frozen soul
Did melt and sing to thee, to thee, supreme.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

DEAR God! Upon your footstool I stood,
Too young on the heights to see.
I reached, strong with faith in self,
And took from life what like toys stand free
Upon the world's wide shelf.

Ecstasy! One long full night 'twas mine,
Until dawn I knew no strife,
And the great white light let fall
Within my being the flame of life,
Became my soul, my all.

Came Fate, took away and kept
All but the tears I wept.

Again! I reached with gathered strength
For Joy. Yearning arms grew bold,
Stifled longings sang aloud
From the depths and answered as of old,
'The meanings yet unavowed.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

O Heart! My treasure was so holy,
Of life's golden store so rare,
My soul waxed warm and strong,
And the world was once again so fair
It could not hold a wrong.

Came Fate, took away and kept
All, e'en the tears I wept.

The Toys! As I look upon the shelf,
For I've grown its heights to see,
What youth so heedlessly sought,
Is still worth all life can give or be
To me in conflict wrought.

O Life! Vast and inarticulate,
Forever will you rise, swell,
Fall on my shrine's inner ear:
Hear me refuse content, 'tis the shell
Of what I've yearned for here.

And Fate, nor tears, nought can take
That world-old cry, my heart-ache.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

SHE walked into Life's market-place
With head held high, and unafraid.
There stands Justice
Upon her pedestal, holding the scales
That forever weigh man's loss and gain.
The maid looked, and laughed,
Unabashed.

Her pretty curls, tossed by the wind,
Mocked with wanton glee
The impish gleam of unbelief
That shone so wickedly,
From under long black lashes,
In her eyes so blue.
'Why should life be made a problem?'
'The world shall glow with love and laughter,
Joy shall meet with joy.'
She scoffed and mocked,
And passed Justice by,
Tossing her curls
Across her impish eyes.

Bowed and worn by the whirl of time,
The squandered years criss-crossed upon her face,

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Again she stood at Justice' side,
In the market-place:
And as the scales fell down and down
With heavy loss,
Her mouth set firm—
There were no curls to toss,
She looked abashed,
And then a sneer
Curled her lip, and in her eyes
Lurked the monster, fear.
She knew the heart's dearest loss,
And the soul's bitterest gain,
But she had never risen to the joy
That outrides pain.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

A FOUNTAIN with bowl wide-lipped,
Near the whispering, listening woods,
Where timorous birds
Alight with tiny feet,
And hesitate, and bend
Wise, listening heads,
And fly away again
With undipped beak.

Music borrowed from wooing birds,
The east wind and south,
Heavy laden with odours
Wafted by the roses
And the lilies;
Their passionate life and death song,
Their yearning and giving,
Aye, yearning
And giving,
This is summer.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Meanings.

WHAT matter if I do not understand :
 Pour around me your meaning ;
I will reap what a passer-by
Can carry away as a gleaning ;
And if it does not satisfy,
Who need care but you and I ?

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

What was said.

WHAT was it they said of her
Down in the depths of Hell?
That the lies she had woven,
Into tissues and webs
Had made her a shroud.

Unloved and unwed,
Although money had bought her a bridal bed:
Her bridegroom had fled
From the lies that had made her too cold
For even the dead.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

What do I know ?

WHAT do I know ?
Ask the west wind what it says
To the rose round which it hovers !
Ask the ashes what the fire it covers
Whispers when it burns and glows !
And the dusk, ask what it knows
Of the night !
Find the source where Wisdom flows,
Then tell me
What I know.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Peace.

Written in an old walled garden, Paris, July, 1921.

YEARS, hundreds, these stone, lichen-covered walls
Embraced this agèd garden as it lies
Placid, at peace, content to heed the calls,
Renewed by Pan each spring in glad surprise,
Piping from his stone niche: 'Awake, sunrise!'

These old gnarled trees, this green swaying grass,
These nestling sparrows, with wings wide spread, can
Burrow in this agèd dust, and pass
In dreams untroubled by wars, or ways of man,
Each peaceful day, content with life's earthly span.

Let me breathe it deep, this old garden's peace,
And know that singing summer-times will ever come,
With golden afternoons, and dust and fire
And agèd trees blown gently in the sun,
And red geraniums a-quiver with desire.

GATHERINGS FROM LIFE AND TIME.

Let me forget the yesterdays, nor cry
For the to-morrows. Give me my golden hour,
To feel that something beyond earth and sky,
That throbs through this garden all a-flower,
Lave me in its peace and tranquil power.

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